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Things didn't go as planned for Carmelo Anthony and the Thunder in New York. Knicks win, 111-96.

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Residents say teens from group home terrorize neighborhood

BY BRIANNA BAILEY
Staff Writer
bbailey@oklahoman.com

NEWCASTLE — Joe Harlin put up an electric fence to keep kids from a neighboring group home for troubled boys out of his yard.

"Private Property, No Trespassing," reads a black and orange sign posted in front of his house.

Harlin said he's had nothing but problems with the teenage boys living next door since Bison Creek Treatment Services group home opened in April.

"I would understand if a ball got tossed over the fence every once in awhile, but it's bricks and trash can lids — I get upset," Harlin said.

He recently caught one boy taking packages out of his mailbox. Some of the teens have taunted and thrown rocks at his dog, he said.

Since Bison Creek opened inside a renovated nursing home facility, residents and business owners say teenage boys from the group home have run amok in this semi-rural neighborhood off State Highway 9.

The home is under contract with the state Department of Human Services to house and care for teenage boys

SEE TEENS, 2A

MORE ONLINE

To see a video concerning the Bison Creek Treatment Services group home, go to Oklahoman.com.

'He's a follower'

INFORMANT IN JERRY DRAKE VARNELL BOMBING CASE SPEAKS OUT

BY MEG WINGERTER
Staff Writer
mwingerter@oklahoman.com

In the months before Jerry Drake Varnell tried to detonate what he thought was a bomb in downtown Oklahoma City, he repeatedly sent messages to a friend he believed supported his plan.

It wasn't an illogical thing to believe. Varnell and Brent Allen Elisens were both young men with mental health problems, criminal records of violence against romantic partners and a penchant for posting conspiracy theories about government corruption online.

The biggest difference between them was that Elisens had agreed to work as an informant and was taking screenshots and recordings of their conversations for use as evidence.

Varnell, 23, was arrested without incident in the early morning hours of Aug. 12 after he allegedly called a cell phone number he thought would detonate a bomb in a truck parked behind the BancFirst building, 101 N Broadway. The person who assisted him with building the bomb was working for the FBI, and the device was inert.

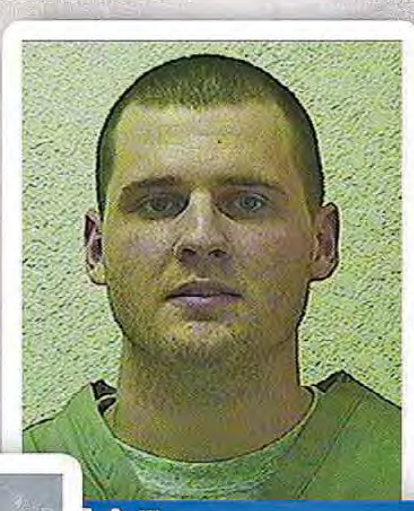
The arrest was the culmination of a more than seven-month-long sting involving the FBI, the Oklahoma City Police Department and an informant who had initially tipped them off. Elisens identified himself as the informant to *The Oklahoman* and shared some recordings and screenshots of messages sent during the investigation. Varnell's mother, Melonie Varnell, corroborated that Elisens acted as an informant in the case. The FBI and Oklahoma City police declined to comment.

Varnell was found mentally competent in November and is scheduled to go to trial early next year. This story's account of the investigation is based on the affidavit and records supplied by Elisens, but Varnell hasn't been convicted of any crimes. His attorneys declined to comment.

Elisens said he chose to speak publicly about his role in the investigation because he feels conflicted about the case. He doesn't believe Varnell would have followed through with a plot without encouragement — it was a job to keep his mind on the task at hand even when Varnell met with investigators, he said.

SEE VARNELL, 6A

RIGHT: Brent Elisens
BELOW: Jerry Drake Varnell



A text message exchange between Jerry Drake Varnell and friend Deshawna Smyth in January 2016. Varnell had discussed going back to school to learn to make cannabis-based alternatives to psychotropic medications, but believed he could be targeted by the government for disrupting the pharmaceutical industry. [PROVIDED BY DESHAWNA SMYTH]

Welcome to our new quarterly magazine, The OK

BY PHILLIP O'CONNOR
Enterprise Editor
poconnor@oklahoman.com

Tucked inside the pages of today's newspaper you'll find a little something extra, the first edition of The OK, a new quarterly magazine available as an added value to our subscribers.

This issue, The Year in Photos, features the outstanding work of *The Oklahoman's* award-winning photography staff. But there's so much more: In-depth stories, insightful profiles, personal essays, food, fashion, technology and on and on.

The goal is to provide a product that engages, enlightens and entertains our readers in a way that is unique to Oklahoma.

We hope you enjoy what you see. Let us know what you think.

TODAY'S PRAYER
Holy God, may we worship You in holiness and faith, and witness to Your loving presence. Amen.

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Volume 126, 351 | 6 sections
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